



Kayaking offers a different point of view for Chicago.

## Kayaking Invites Us to See the World Differently

WHAT IF YOU COULD SIT IN THE WATER without getting soaked, paddle beside a family of painted turtles basking on a log, watch a deer swim across the river, or admire the majesty of a great blue heron swooping into a nearby tree—or, get a new perspective of your favorite city from its open waterways? From its utilitarian inception to its recreational uses today, kayaks have become a staple for those looking for ways to reconnect with nature while benefitting from physical activity.

### A New Old Idea

Developed roughly 4,000 years ago by indigenous people living in subarctic parts of the world, kayaks were a hunter's boat comprised of seal skins and driftwood carefully crafted to meet the needs of each user. A waterproof skirt or spray-deck was attached to a cockpit to keep the paddler dry, and the ability to recover from a rollover was a skill

that was essential to survival. Technology and materials continue to evolve along with the uses of these watercrafts.

"The greatest advantage of kayaking is that you're more intimate with the water," Friends of the Fox River President Gary Swick said. "You feel like you're sitting in the water instead of above it."

### Finding the Perfect Fit

L.L. Bean's Outdoor Programmer and Outreach Coordinator Stavros Yfantis recommends investing in equipment that suits the individual, their skill level, and the places they'd like to paddle. "A good kayak should last decades," Yfantis says, elaborating on the qualities essential to watercraft longevity. Plastic watercrafts made with one mold are more durable than those formed when a top and bottom mold are joined by a seam. Thick, hard plastic skip plates on the bottom help reduce the occurrence of drag holes.



A short kayak trip allows for opportunities to reconnect with friends and nature.

"I have a couple different kayaks—a whitewater boat I take out onto Lake Michigan, designed to maneuver and zip around, and a lake-quality boat that I can take on the river that's easier to paddle and keep straight," Swick said.

While children and pets can kayak in tandem set-ups, both Gary Swick and Wateriders's manager Aidan Klug recommend those who would like to try paddling solo be at least 16 years old, unless already skilled or accompanied by an adult in a tandem kayak. Swick compares the experience of kayaking with the freedom of riding a motorcycle. Like a motorcycle, most recreational kayaks offer little space to store food, extra clothing, and all the other accoutrements younger children need.

### Types of Kayaks

Sit-on-tops (SOTs) are open-hulled, 9-12' long, self-draining recreational kayaks designed for use in small lakes and quiet rivers. Fishing kayaks



Susan Allman navigates rapids on the Kickapoo.  
(Photo: Steve LaPorte)





Sit-on-top kayaks are popular on quiet rivers.

are open-hulled watercrafts designed for calm water that are specially equipped with anchor systems, rod holders, and storage. Elastic straps or bungee cords strung across the deck allow for some lightweight equipment to be attached.

Sit-in day or light touring kayaks are more efficient 12-15' boats that offer straighter tracking and better control in light wind and currents, along with a little more space for cargo. For intermediate to advanced kayakers, touring kayaks 16' and longer offer more storage and better handling in moderate wind and currents. Sit-in touring sea kayaks or "seayaks" have a skeg (rudder) to assist with navigation in wind and currents, and more cargo space for the enthusiast who is looking for a boat that will travel longer distances. Folding kayaks offer the handling of touring kayaks with the benefit of reduced space for storage. Inflatable kayaks, while also requiring less storage space, are designed for recreation rather than touring.

Paddles are more generic. Longer, skinnier paddles enable sharper turning, but can be more of a hindrance than help in tight spaces. Shorter, wider paddles can be handy in rafting venues. "The standard size is convenient and comfortable in most cases," says Yfantis.

### Ready, Set, Paddle!

While many rivers have been high this spring, summer heat, reduced rainfall, and ongoing drainage usually bring the water down to a navigable level. The U.S. Geological Survey provides a real-time table of stream flow rates for each state. "I keep a log of the water level, water temperature, and weather," says North Barringtonite Susan Allman, a kayaking member of Prairie State Canoeists since 2010. "Sometimes the water



Liam (left) and Jim Anderson paddle down the Harpeth River.



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## Tips for a Happier Trip

- Take a class or connect with a group familiar with the waterway you'd like to paddle. Note: You don't have to master the roll, but you should learn what to do if you fall out and how to stay safe.
- Attend a kayaking discovery course through L.L. Bean, South Barrington offered every Saturday and Sunday at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. at Busse Lake. Contact L.L. Bean to register or see about renting a kayak from L.L. Bean or Chicago River Canoe & Kayak.
- Participate in a new member paddle on the Des Plaines River from Russell Road to Wadsworth Road with Prairie State Canoeists on July 28.
- Enjoy a guided kayak tour of Chicago with Wateriders.
- Start with a short trip or lake paddle. Kayaking can be more exercise than some may think, providing a low impact workout for the core and shoulders.
- Plan trips when there's less water traffic. Kenkel suggests early mornings and weekdays at Busse Lake. Klug favors evenings on the Chicago River.
- Wear clothing that can wick away moisture (instead of jeans and T-shirts) and always wear a life jacket.

drains fast if it hasn't rained in a long time, causing the kayak to scrape the bottom."

In lake-like rivers such as the Fox, higher flow rates don't look as fast as they do in smaller, winding channels like Nippersink Creek. "Sometimes the force of the water will slam you against a tree and if you don't know how to get out of it, you might be taking a swim," adds Allman.

For those looking for a small lake to try kayaking, Yfantis recommends The Hollows in Cary because "the water is crystal clear and you can see 20' down". At Busse Lake, Chicago River Canoe & Kayak Launch Assistant Sarah Kenkel suggests paddling beyond the bridge (Higgins Road) to enjoy viewing frogs, fish, and birds, including an occasional bald eagle.

Klug's favorite trip is Wateriders' Moonlight Paddle on the Chicago River because of the beautiful reflections of city lights on the water. For Allman, the section of the Kishwaukee River connecting Marengo to Belvidere offers twists and turns in a setting that is "rural, peaceful, and calm, with interesting ripples here and there". Along the Fox River, there are many great trips, however, it's important to know where the dams are located and be prepared to portage (carry your kayak) around these dangerous areas.


"When I am with my paddle gals, someone always says 'another day in paradise' followed by 'I can't believe it's free!'" says Allman. Kayaking on local lakes and rivers immerses each paddler in the wonders of both natural and human communities, offering countless opportunities to see the world differently and come away refreshed. 

PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO



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*Collaborating on the Pederson Preserve project are Susan Lenz, Barrington Area Conservation Trust; Kevin Scheiwiller, Citizens for Conservation; and Faye Sinnott, Flint Creek/Spring Creek Watersheds Partnership.*

## CONSERVATION GROUPS COLLABORATE FOR PEDERSON PRESERVE

Pederson Preserve, located close to the heart of downtown Barrington and across from Barrington High School, has been utilized by over 1,000 students and community members each year through classroom field experiences, special events, and summer internship programs. Since 2011, BACT has been actively restoring this 5.6-acre parcel which connects more than 20 adjoining acres of wetlands and prairies and includes a stretch of Flint Creek.

This year's restoration in this outdoor living classroom will focus on creating a shoreline access area, as well as native plant buffer zone that will offer educational opportunities for residents as well as students.

A highlight of this project is the collaboration of Barrington Area Conservation Trust, along with Flint Creek/Spring Creek Watersheds Partnership, and Citizens for Conservation. These will include the creation of a native plant demonstration area, plant and plan recommendations, and other resources to help Barrington area residents with water protection efforts in their yards.

## GENEROUS NONPROFIT SUPPORT

The Barrington Area Community Foundation provided a grant to support this multi-year project. Preparation of the planting area and stream bank is supported by grant funding from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, Barrington Junior Women's Club, as well as contributions from donors to a matching gift campaign on DonorVest.com.

To learn more, visit [www.flintcreekspringcreekwatersheds.org](http://www.flintcreekspringcreekwatersheds.org)